



File Code: 1950

Date: September 17, 2020

Designated Objection Period for Hale Lake Area Management Project

Dear Hale Lake Area Management Project Commenters:

You are receiving this letter because you previously commented on this project and may have objection standing.

We appreciate your interest in this project and your time in giving us feedback on our draft Environmental Assessment (EA). We received a wide variety of comment letters from the public indicating a strong passion for how recreation in the area is managed. Comments ranged from outright support or disapproval for the project to specific access issues for motorized and non-motorized users alike. All of the comments received throughout the project planning process were reviewed by my team with consideration given to the original purpose and need, and our mandate as an agency to care for the land.

I have decided to implement Alternative 2 with some modifications based on consideration of potential resource issues identified in the EA and comments received regarding conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users.

I have opted to limit the proposed trails in single-track area #1 to non-motorized access only. This is in recognition of several concerns expressed that the proposed action and alternative would relegate the area to motorized users only, effectively pushing existing non-motorized recreation out of the area. By removing the proposal special vehicle designation in this area that would allow E-bikes, we will minimize the safety risks associated with potentially faster E-bikes and typically much slower non-motorized users. E-bikes will still have access to all of the proposed motorized trails in the area and all open USFS roads.

I have also opted to allow for the red loop in Hale Canyon that was proposed in Alternative #2, but with the addition of a seasonal closure in place to protect key elk winter range and to provide for preservation of existing non-motorized hunting opportunities. The seasonal closure will extend from September 1st through March 15th. Temporary closures may also be put in place on trails throughout the project area during monsoon season as needed to prevent excessive rutting or trail damage.

The draft decision notice, final EA, and Finding of No Significant Impact are all available for review online at the project page at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56577>, or can be acquired in hard copy by calling the Smokey Bear District Office at: 575-257-6174.



Attached you will find information on the official start of the objection period, and how to participate in this phase if you have objection standing. The official start date of the objection period will be based upon publication of the legal notice in the Ruidoso news, the anticipated publication date is Friday, September 18th.

Please take care, be safe, and hopefully get outside and enjoy the National Forest.

Sincerely,

JODIE CANFIELD
District Ranger

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